

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4842

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 1715

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, PINT, AR

SUBJECT: PRESSURES INCREASE ON MILITARY TO ACT

1. OVER WEEKEND POLITICAL CONTACTS CLOSE TO MILITARY REPORTED THAT "GO SLOW" POLICY OF CINCS WITH RESPECT TO THE GOLPE TIMING CAUSING INCREASING FRICTION. REPORTEDLY, SOME HARDLINERS IN SENIOR RANKS ARE BECOMING IMPATIENT WITH CINCS TIMETABLE AND WANT THEM TO MOVE MORE QUICKLY. ACCORDING TO SOURCES, THIS FEELING MAY BE SHARED BY SEVERAL CORPS COMMANDERS.

2. DANGER OUR SOURCES AND THEIR MILITARY CONTACTS SEE IS THAT ON EVE OF WHAT IS PLANNED AS "MODERATE" COUP, HARDLINERS MAY BE TEMPTED TO PUSH ASIDE VIDELA AND MODERATE LEADERSHIP AND STAGE A CHILEAN-STYLE GOLPE.

3. MANAGING EDITOR OF INFLUENTIAL LA OPINION TOLD EMBOFFS OVER WEEKEND THAT HE HAD GONE TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS ON MARCH 13 TO ASCERTAIN MILITARY POLICY TOWARD FREEDOM OF PRESS IN POST-COUP PERIOD. HE WAS DIRECTED TO THE OFFICE OF A NAVAL CAPTAIN WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS THE FUTURE PRESS SPOKESMAN FOR THE MILITARY GOVT. ACCORDING TO THIS OFFICER, MILITARY PLAN NEAR TOTAL BLACKOUT OF LOCAL NEWS FOR SHORT PERIOD FOLLOWING COUP. AFTER THAT PRESS WOULD BE ALLOWED CONSIDERABLE SCOPE FOR EDITORIAL OPINION WITH SOME GUIDELINES WHICH MILITARY WOULD HOPE TO BE BOTH EXPLICIT AND RELATIVELY PERMISSIVE. NAVAL OFFICER NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT WHILE POLICIES HE

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WAS OUTLINING WERE PRODUCT OF PROLONGED AND INTENSIVE

STAFF WORK THEY WERE SUBJECT TO IMMEDIATE CHANGE IF
"HARDLINERS LOSE THEIR COOL" AND ELBOW ASIDE THE MODERATES.

4. SEVERAL SOURCES REPORTED OVER WEEKEND THAT THERE
WAS GROWING BELIEF THAT MUCH OF VIOLENCE THAT
RECENTLY OCCURRED IN CORDOBA AREA WAS RESULT OF FIELD
GRADE OFFICERS JUMPING GUN AND SETTLING SCORES WITH
ABOVE-GROUND ELEMENTS OF SUBVERSIVE APPARATUS. THIS
ACTIVITY HAD BEEN SOURCE OF EXTREME CONCERN TO TOP
MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND HAD RESULTED IN SOME RADICAL
CONGRESSMEN FROM CORDOBA WHO WERE NOT UNSYMPATHETIC
TO VIEW THAT COUP INEVITABLE, MAKING SPEECHES IN
CONGRESS, DECRYING VIOLENCE AND EXPRESSING HOPE THAT
MILITARY NOT INVOLVED. ARMY LEADERSHIP RESPONDED TO
CONGRESSMEN IN OBLIQUE MANNER BY NOTING THAT IN ONLY
AREA OF COUNTRY WHERE THEY HAVE COMPLETE OPERATIONAL
FREEDOM (TUCUMAN) THESE ILLEGAL, VIOLENT ACTS NOT
OCCURRING. CHARGES THAT ARMY RESPONSIBLE FOR
VIOLENCE IN CONGRESS AND OTHER AREAS WAS DISMISSED
AS ATTEMPT TO DEFAME MILITARY. HOWEVER, ARMY SPOKESMAN
PROMISED INVESTIGATION INTO THESE ALLEGATIONS WOULD BE
CARRIED OUT.

5. COMMENT: TOP LEADERSHIP MAY WELL BE INCREASINGLY
CONCERNED THAT IF IT DOES NOT ACT SOON, MORE MILITANT
OFFICERS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO TAKE OVER AND PULL OFF HARDLINE
COUP. GIVEN THIS CONCERN, BOMBING OF ARMY HEADQUARTERS MAR 15
(SEE SEPTTEL) CLEARLY INCREASES PRESSURES ON CINCS TO MOVE
IF THEY ARE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. WE ARE
RECEIVING INCREASING SPECULATION FROM POLITICAL SOURCES
THAT BOMBING MAY HAVE BEEN "FINAL STRAW" THAT WILL
TRIGGER COUP IN NEXT FEW DAYS.
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